

CITY OF MESA
HUMAN RELATIONS ADVISORY BOARD (HRAB)
Ad Hoc Disabilities Action Team (DAT)
April 15, 2014 Action Minutes

The Disabilities Action Team of the City of Mesa met on April 15th, 2014,
at 5:30pm at the Mesa City Plaza, 20 E. Main St. Ste. 170.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mark Tompert, Chair
Cheryl Anderson
Denise Heap

MEMBERS ABSENT

Lu Ann Schmidt

STAFF PRESENT

Andrea Arenas
Anne Gervase
Ruth Giese
Justin Smothers
Paul Thomas

GUESTS

1. Call to Order.

Mr. Tompert called the meeting to order at 5:33pm.

2. Items from citizens present.

There were no citizens who requested to speak to DAT.

3. Approval of minutes from the March 18th, 2014 DAT meeting.

Ms. Heap made a motion to approve the March 18th, 2014 DAT meeting minutes, Ms. Anderson seconded the motion. The motion moved unanimously.

4. Hear update, discuss and take action on new protocol for diverting defendants with mental health issues, veterans, and the homeless from court administrators.

Mr. Thomas and Ms. Gervase, Court Administrators for the City of Mesa, presented a follow up on their new protocol for diverting defendants with mental health issues, veterans and homeless. Mr. Thomas stated that since their last presentation to the full board on January 22nd, 2014, they have increased the number of veterans seen in order to justify an area designated Veterans Justice Officer (VJO) from the US Department of Veterans Affairs. They have done so with regional collaborations with City of Chandler and Town of Gilbert and are working towards modeling a veteran court similar to the one in Phoenix. In Phoenix, veterans who are facing civil and misdemeanor charges are handled through one assigned judge who works closely with the VJO and other social services. During the veteran's time in the court system, the team will assess the individual's situation and attempts to connect the veteran to appropriate programs such as substance-abuse treatment, anger management, job training or mental-health treatment. Those who complete the ordered treatment programs may be eligible to have charges dropped. Mr. Thomas noted that they are not dispensing the current legal process, just making mental health and other services a bigger part of it to prevent recidivism. For example, it is often post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries or other underlying issues that bring veterans into the court system. This clinical approach is also used in the juvenile court systems.

Mr. Thomas announced that the entire court staff from the three jurisdictions will be receiving training in the summer on the new structure in order to produce consistency among the cities. It is currently proposed to have one dedicated judge to handle all of the veterans' related case in the three areas. Then, each city will be able to dedicate specific administrative staff to assist with these cases. Ms. Anderson questioned if the training will be required. In response, Mr. Thomas answered that the training will not be required; however, most staff members are motivated to attend given that they will be implementing the process soon. Mr. Thomas also commented that they have received no resistance from staff thus far.

In addition to the veterans, Mr. Thomas stated that they are also evaluating a similar system for those with mental health concerns or homeless. To address mental health concerns, they have arranged for the pre-screening to take place at the courts rather than elsewhere, such as a medical facility, due to the fact that there was a 40% no show rate. This screening is very important because it can demonstrate whether a defendant is mentally able to stand trial. Since they have implemented the screenings at the court in spring 2013, they have seen a nearly 100% participation rate. Currently, there are two doctors under contract who can administer the test. They also have the availability to be on call for defendants with specialized circumstances as they enter the jail. Pre-trial sessions are also moved to occur after the evaluations so the prosecutors and defense team are able to view the results prior.

The DAT team members commented positively on the direction and progress of the court staff. Ms. Heap questioned if there would be considerations for a similar approach or including victims of sex trafficking. In response, Mr. Thomas suggested that the prosecutors be the first line of contact. Mr. Tompert also noted that victims would likely not end up in the courts given that police are becoming more educated on whom to legally pursue. Mr. Thomas agreed that if emergency assistance is needed then police would be the ones to provide that, then the prosecutors would be secondary should the victims end up in court. Mr. Tompert concluded by stating that they would like quarterly updates at the DAT meetings and asked court staff to direct them if any assistance or support is needed.

5. Hear update, discuss and take action on an educational awareness campaign related to service animals.

Ms. Giese informed the board members of an educational brochure which provides new business owners topical information, including regulations on service animals. Ms. Giese stated that this would be a great way to proactively distribute the information and complement the work they have already done. Ms. Giese suggested that staff could work on drafting the flyer over the summer in order to move forward in the new board season. DAT approved of the idea and agreed to have staff work on the draft flyer.

6. Discuss, consider and take action on ways to educate the community on mental health issues.

Mr. Tompert noted that two executives from Marc Community Resources, Inc. will be making a presentation to the full board at the upcoming April 23rd, 2014 meeting. DAT will continue to look for other potential speakers in the future to continue educating the board and the community on mental health issues.

7. Scheduling of meetings, future agenda items, and general information.

- Next DAT meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 20th, 2014 at 5:30pm.

DAT members agreed to cancel the May meeting and reconvene after the Strategic Planning meeting in August.

8. Adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 6:15pm.

Submitted By:



Ruth Giese,
Diversity Program Administrator